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AUTHOR Iwamura, Susan Grohs
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ABSTRACT

Student experiences in an exchange program linking the University of Hawaii and the Graduate School of Business in Lyon, France illustrate the positive impact of foreign internships. The students were enrolled in internship programs in travel industry management. The reports written by the students reveal that the experiences have affected the students' motivation to expand and perfect their skills in the foreign language, their understanding of the relationship between language and culture, and their view of comparative business practices. All participants appeared to be better able to adopt a case study approach and participant-observer perspective than their counterparts who did not have a foreign internship, and they seemed to develop a sense that the whole language/culture complex assigns values on the basis of internal rather than external relationships, making them more sensitive employees in the future. (MSE)

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INTERNSHIP AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRAINING: BLENDING ACADEMIC STUDY AND EXTRA-ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Dr. Susan G. Iwamura
Assistant Dean

School of Business Administration
University of Hawaii
2404 Maile Way
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822 U.S.A.

(804) 946-8946

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Internship and foreign language training: blending academic study and extra-academic experience

Susan Grohs Iwamura
College of Business Administration
University of Hawaii

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Two major topics in discussions on teaching languages for special purposes have been (1) learner motivation, and, (2) the intimate relationship between language and culture. When professional programs include internships, the significance of these two issues can be clearly demonstrated. In addition, the professional training is itself enhanced by the comparisons students make between the practice of the profession at home and abroad.

In this presentation, I will draw on cases of students who were completing Bachelor of Business Administration degrees with majors in Travel Industry Management. Since 1985 was the first year we established an exchange program with the Graduate School of Business in Lyon, I have only one example of a report written by a French student who came to Honolulu to complete an internship. I will use this limited set of cases to examine the impact of the foreign internship experience on the student's motivation to improve his or her skills in the foreign language, on his or her understanding of the relationship between language and culture, and on his or her view of comparative business practices.

Motivation to expand and perfect skill in the foreign language

Two cases which illustrate this point especially well are the students who "exchanged" positions for six weeks during the summer. One came from Lyon to work as a host in a restaurant in Honolulu; the other traveled from Honolulu to serve as a *stagiaire* at a ski resort in the French Alps.

The French student found varieties of English that he had not encountered before although he had spent time in New Orleans. At first he thought he was observing differences that could simply be attributed to socio-economic class. His observations and experience allowed him to develop a broader view of the complexities of the linguistic topology of Hawaii and, although I never heard him use what we call "pidgin", I know his comprehension of varieties of English expanded considerably during his stay. Since he is training for a career in international business, his broader ability to understand English should prove useful.

While we realize that few of our American students achieve the same mastery of French as their French counterparts do with respect to English, we can develop a sense of how to help our students by observing in which areas they feel particularly weak. The student who became a *stagiaire* was assigned to the *Réception* where she was expected to provide information and to give directions. Describing how to get from one place to another is a popular exercise in elementary language courses. I suspect it is used very little, if at all, in more advanced courses. If you think about how difficult it is to give directions even in your first language--especially if someone is unfamiliar with the territory being described--you begin to appreciate the problem of this student. Even after she mastered the linguistic material she needed to perform her job, she found that she had to understand cultural values as well. This brings me to my next topic.

Awareness of relationship between language and culture

Our student discovered that even when she had mastered the vocabulary and syntax she needed, she still had to learn the type and quantity of information that was expected. She observed that too little information confused people and too much detail irritated them. She felt that you could never give too much information to an American because Americans would know that you were just trying to help. French guests, on the other hand, felt that you were talking down to them if you were too specific. Whether or not our student drew an accurate conclusion is not important here. What matters is that she understood that mastery of linguistic form was insufficient; communicative function must also be learned. No doubt she made a number of similar adjustments which she did not notice or remember.

Another aspect of the relationship between language and culture was illustrated in the perception of the students as representative of all foreigners. Both the student who worked in France and one who worked for five months in a small hotel in southern Germany found that they were expected to deal with foreigners, even when these foreigners were neither American nor English-speaking. It seems that the attitude which prevailed was that you are either native or non-native and all non-natives have more in common with each other than they have with any native. Both students who worked in Europe found that non-natives generally do not receive special consideration. This was especially true in the case of the student who worked in Germany. The situation in the French Alps was different because the clientele was made up of large numbers of Europeans who came regularly through tour agency bookings. When arrangements are made ahead of arrival, special programs are developed.

How non-natives are handled, especially in a service industry such as tourism, is an special concern of students who understand more than one language and culture. It is the context of this concern that I will examine what students learn about business practices when they work outside their own culture.

Comparing Business Practices

An excellent example of a student's examination of the issue of how well equipped American hotels are to serve foreigners comes from a woman who did not work in an overseas internship but learned about the expectations of a specifc set of foreigners through her job in Honolulu. Her obervations resulted from the same kind of knowledge of foreign visitor expectations that she might have received from an internship outside the U.S. This student is Japanese-American, learned Japanese as a child and worked for a number of years for the Honolulu office of the Japan Tourist Bureau. Here she became acquainted with what hotel arrangements are expected by Japanese travellers, especially those on business trips. On a field trip with a group of students from the School of Travel Industry Management, she observed conditions at several major hotels on the U.S. mainland.

This student's report on her trip dealt with the differences between the expectations of Americans and Japanese when they travel on business. She made a number of recommendations suggesting how hotels could attract both groups. As a student of Travel Industry Management, she was able to

better understand what she had been taught in class about hotel marketing and management and, at the same time, she learned that some ideas that seem to be accepted universally may not suit all consumers. For example, American hotel companies are currently investing in special VIP floors or areas within hotels. These units, often called "clubs", are for people who are willing to pay a premium for certain amenities, such as continental breakfast, complimentary coffee, and cocktail hours. In addition, such units are useful for making business contacts. Also popular among recent improvements are in-house exercise facilities, and van service from airports. For various reasons relating to Japanese culture, these will not be used by Japanese businessmen--with one exception. The VIP units will be appreciated for the privacy they provide. Hotel management may not realize that Japanese businessmen enjoy these arrangements because the businessmen do not like to be seen alone and, therefore, are unlikely to participate in the social aspects of the VIP areas. This student's knowledge of Japanese language and culture helped her to foresee difficulties that the hotels she visited might have if they decide to include businessmen from Japan in their target markets. She is prepared to make concrete, rather simple suggestions, such as providing a courtesy car rather than a van.

The student in Germany compared a number of major features such as record-keeping, productivity, and motivation of employees. She was also concerned with the level of service that was provided and the sanitation standards that prevailed in the hotel kitchen. Had this student not gone to Germany, she might not have been able to analyze as clearly these elements in the operation of a hotel.

Conclusion

In addition to the specific points mentioned above, some general characteristics seem typical of students' experiences as reflected in their reports. All of the students seem to be able to adopt a "case study" approach more easily than students who write such reports based on jobs they held in the U.S. This "participant-observer" posture is extremely valuable in providing the student with one of the major benefits of the internship experience, the ability to analyze a business operation and to integrate this analysis with the academic background supplied by business classes.

Students appear to develop a sense that language and culture are not only intimately intertwined but also a sense that the whole language/culture complex assigns values on the basis of internal--not external-- relationships. What will make a hotel attractive to Americans will not necessarily ensure its popularity among Frenchmen, Germans, or Japanese. Presumably, this understanding will stay will the student even if he or she does not continue to work in a location where the specific language is used. Such an awareness will not only assist the student in appreciating a broader range of cultural and linguistic experiences in his or her lifetime, but will also make the student a more sensitive and therefore more effective employee.